

Bill Byrd Interview, June 7, 1994 tape one, sides A and B

Discuss bike ride he is planning to the coast.

Talk about my feeling returning to old growth through Sisters area.

JW: Why don't we start from the beginning. I'd like to know when you started climbing and why, had you started climbing before you came to the Tetons

Byrd: Oh yeah, and how I started climbing was quite by accident if you want to go back to the very beginning. I was born and raised in Salem, which is 75 miles down the pike, and my dad was a fisherman, and my mother loved to hike and camp, and so we very often did those things, but nobody ever thought of climbing to the tops of those mountains which you always looked at and said ah about. Well when i got to be a teenager a neighbor friend of mine Rick Steves who now lives over in florence and takes car of wild birds that are injured with the cooperation of the Oregon Wildlife department, he rehabs them and turns them back into the wild. Anyway, interesting guy. Well, we grew up together and Rich and I when we got to be teenagers what we did was we'd go down to the Salem Alton papermill, and we'd hop the logging flats on the train being towed back up to detroit which in those days there was no damn or anything, and the road ended at ldata.

Jean: Would the train people know you were there on the train? You were the original hobos.

Byrd: No. in those days there weren't all these crazy government regulations and unions and stuff which we have to come up with nowadays, course that improved the workman's lot by a considerable amount but that is neither here nor there. We were just kids and we wanted a way to get up to Detroit and Sant a Am to fish those high lakes. There was nobody up there in those days, and there was no limit on the fish you could catch. You could catch all the fish that you'd want and then bring them home.

Jean: Were you fishing with bait?

Byrd: Oh no, we were always flyfishing. Forever. Forever flyfishing. My dad was a flyfisherman. He hated bait. Oh, we would float eggs for steelhead you know in the winter, stuff like that, because we didn't know you could catch them on a fly, now I fly fish for steelhead too. Anyway, so Rich and I would hop the train, and the engineer and the fireman, and there were three on the crew and I forget what the other one was called, but inevitably we'd get just about five miles out of town toward Turner and they'd discover us riding on those things. And it was dangerous as hell, cause on a logging flat there was absolutely no place to sit, and so they'd stop the train, the guy would come back and say [deep voice]

"Where the hell do you guys think you are going?"[imitates high voice]

"Well, we're just going fishing?"

"Okay, come on up in the tinder. So we'd ride on up in the Tinder and we'd have a great time. "Oh boy, can I do the whistle?" [we laugh]

So we'd get up to Idata and they'd dump us out, and they'd say now remember, Sunday night the train leaves for Salem about 8 o'clock so if you're gonna ride back you have to be here by 8 or you're gonna have to stay over till Tuesday. Well we couldn't miss school so we had to be back. Well this was only like Saturday morning, so we'd head off for the high lakes. One of the places we liked was Daily lake and it was right under three fingered Jack, right close to Three-fingered Jack. And we always looked at Three Fingered Jack [ogles] uh, goll And this time we thought, Well, I wonder what it would be like to go up there? So the two of us started up, on the wrong side, that I know now, and we finally got to the ridge and up to what they call the pinnacle.

Jean: At that point on the mountain is when you'd need a rope?

Byrd: That is when the climbing clubs now traditionally rope up.

Actually you'd climb it free now, but in those days it was uh, huh. So we came back down and besides it was terribly late, it was a lot higher than we thought, as usually, we had underestimated the thing completely and it was getting dark, so fortunately we got off the crazy mountain and back down to timberline before it got down and we knew our way back down to the lake, so that worked fine, but that was my first mountain experience, but that just whetted the appetite. And the next time we went up, I went with another friend of mine cause Rich didn't really want to climb he was not interested in that, and my neighbor down the street was an absolute idiot, he was always in trouble in the neighborhood and I thought this is the ideal companion.

Jean: This is the perfect person.

Byrd: The perfect person to go up so Joe and I went up and we actually climbed three hungry jack without any ropes or anything else.

Jean: Was there a sense of danger? Did anybody know?

Byrd: Oh god, no, we were just going fishing, I figured the folks'd have a fit, but after we climbed it and came back, then I discovered there was a hiking club in Salem, called the Shemakadins. And I told my dad what we'd done you know and dad just laughed but he also said you know you are crazy for doing this but there are mountain climbing techniques and you really ought to learn em.

Jean: What year?

Byrd: This would be 1937, 38 about the time Paul was climbing all over the Tetons.

Jean: And he had started to develop his own techniques.

Byrd: Well yeah, the Durrance brothers, Paul and Glenn, a whole bunch of guys, Underhill, Bob Underhill, uh, uh, the lady rancher, Betty ... Woolsey.

Jean: There is also Geraldine Lucas who climbed the grand.

Byrd: Yeah Lucas, and God I forget some of the oldies, but they were, they discovered the Tetons and all this was going on. Well when I discovered the Shemekans there were maybe two fellows in the entire city of Salem who'd every went above Timberline, and I buddied up with them and we climbed mount Washington, and oh then I heard about the Mazambas in Portland. So the two guys and I, Dick Chambers and his brother and I went up and climbed Mt. Hood with the Mazambas, and then I learned to ski and then World War II came along and I went into the Mountain Infantry. First I was drafted and went to Fort Lewis.

Jean: Did you know McLaren?

Byrd: Doug? I knew him later. he was in the 86th I think, which was one of the regiments, I was in the 90th, and I think Doug went to Kiska Alaska with the 86th we called the no Japs at all rescue regiments cause they got up there and the Japanese had evacuated Kiska by that time, and they came busting in there with this big invasion and there wasn't anybody there, so the Japanese had gone to Ato, which was quite a battle, but the 86th mountain division wasn't there that was a marine operation, but the Japanese gave up the idea of the Siberian Peninsula very early on, and kept in the South Pacific which is where I ended up, so I started out in the mountain infantry and ended up in the South Pacific

Jean: Needing to know how to scuba dive! So how much technical rock climbing did you know before the war actually started? Did you learn in the war?

Byrd: See, the 10th mountain division was made up of volunteers. The army was planning the invasion of Italy, they knew they had to get across the Alps, so they figured they'd need a mountain division, so they started to recruit from the ranks of skiers, and climbers and from references of the American Alpine club and so on, And you couldn't find 10,000 climbers in the United States in 1941. There weren't that many people climbing mountains.

Jean: So basically, they looked for athletes.

Byrd: Well, we ended up when they decided the division was trained and ready to go overseas, we were still below, this was a light division, which in those days the army called 12,000 men. We had 9,400. And they had to fill us, overfill us before the invasion because you take so many casualties before the invasion and you get down to 9 or 10 thousand really quick, so they had to break up a tank outfit in Georgia and bring those poor kids that had taken their induction in the army in Georgia, in the American South and bring them up to Pando Colo at 12,000 ft and dump them into the mountain industry

Jean: Any altitude sickness?

Byrd: Most of them ended up in the Denver hospital with rheumatic fever. Then the mountain division took off - the sergeant came out one morning and said, we need some volunteers, there is a train making up to go to Fort Mead, well in those days what that meant was, you were going to the European theater of action, and nobody wanted to fight the Japanese. They were Kamakazee, they don't take any prisoners, you gotta shoot everybody. And beside that, they didn't take any prisoners either. You knew dang well if you went to the south pacific you probably weren't coming back. The germans played by the rules once in a while, but the Japanese didn't know any rules, you know our white western ways. Its hard for a person growing up in your generation with so much foreign contact and so much international travel to understand the mind set of us growing up in isolation and you know the mystique about the Japanese at the time was awesome. So we were scared shitless of going to the South Pacific. So when the sergeant said there was a train going up to Ft. Mead a bunch of us volunteered, here you are 19, years old, you've never been conned in your life. So we ended up on this train we end up going to Camp Carson to train for a couple of month and the train headed west for California, so I volunteered myself out of the mountain industry into the guata canal outfit.
[Laughs]

Jean: So were you not climbing any longer?

Byrd: No we climbed a lot in the 10th, I was in the 10th training for eight months.

Jean: Did you fall in love with the sport at that point?

Byrd: Oh yeah, geez you know, and what I kept thinking was, how did we ever get up and down three-fingered Jack? My god you're supposed to use these ropes and things. And I thought, gee, as soon as I get home, if I get home, I am going to climb all the mountains in Oregon. The right way! [we laugh]

I came in as a replacement in Guata Canal when the action was about half over, and then we made the beachhead on New Georgia, then the Beach Head on Bell le vela then we had our biggest operation was the beach head Lin guin gulf we came in with McCarther at Lyn gui and I was the platoon sergeant of the first boat that his the beach. Lovely. And so I took five hits right off the bat, right up my leg and I thought I'd never climb again, but they were just flesh wounds. I had never been shot before, so I was panic stricken. It was just a machine gun burst and they entered one two three four five [shows the line up his leg] and then a fleshy one up here.

Jean: So it didn't really inhibit your physical ability.

Byrd: Huh uh. The doc took a look at me and pulled this one out. he pulled this bullet out. he pulled this one out next to my hip bone. And he said, now son, I'm leaving the rest of these in there, and it'll just form scar tissue and you'll never know they're there.

Jean: So are they still there?

Byrd: Yeah, well one of em came out during my -- with the peace corp. Scared everybody to death. I got hit playing volleyball, and it burst that little scar sac around the bullet head and the thing just went pleah, it came right out

Jean: Oh my goodness, were you wearing shorts?

Byrd: yes, it scared the guy to death, he'd run his knee into me and popped that scar tissue, and this thing came shooting out, well it wasn't a big mess, but this kid about died, he thought my god, what have I done?

Jean: so then you continued to fight down there until the end of the war?

Byrd: Yeah, see we made the landing on Lou sei in the gulf, and then we were eight months in the battle of lou san, and I got hit three or four more times, but that was a long, 181 days on the front line, the longest any combat troops have ever been on the front line continuously.

Jean: Did you lose a lot of your friends?

Byrd: We turned our personnel over about 12 times

Jean: So you were really fortunate that you survived.

Byrd: I don't know how I made it. Anyway, and so the war is over and I came home, and then I went right back to the Shamakadins and started climbing the local peaks in Oregon and improving technique and learning from others.

Jean: Improving your own technique or improving upon techniques that existed.

Byrd: Oh yeah, that existed.

Jean: So you were part of Oregon's climbing development. You were altering the sport.

Byrd: There were still not a dozen guys in Salem who were climbers. But it soon expanded and I did some things with the mazamas and I ended up teaching their climbing schools a couple of times.

Jean: When was this. I'm trying to establish what other climbing schools existed before Exum.

Byrd: The closest thing would be Mt. Rainier. Jim and Lou Whittaker are the people for me to contact. this is a paraphrase. Byrd traded with Jim and Lou on a guide exchange for a year while Jim and Lou went to work with Paul.

See there was a year or two there when Exum and Paul had this big hassle over who was going to run it.

Jean: Yeah, that was 55 when Exum left for a year.

Okay that was the year that we made the trade.

Jean: Do you know much about that, what happened there.

Byrd: Well, these are two very different guys. And it was hard to see them doing anything compatible in terms of running a business. Paul had a lot of revolutionary ideas about how to guide. paul was an idea man. Glenn was just a nice man, ultra conservative, frozen in the past, pretty much in terms of thinking and climbing and the works, great guy to work for in terms of his personality.

Jean: What about his personality made it easy to work for Glenn.

Byrd: Well Glenn had a great sense of humor for one thing. He could laugh very easily. And in a business like guiding, that's important because your people are all nervous, there is a lot of anxiety about can I do it or not, and people need to be encouraged a lot, and Glenn was good at that, he wouldn't hesitate to bark commands, but in those days that was also more appropriate. People were used to that kind of thing. Glenn was a very good guide. I think he was a top-notch guide, personally. In terms of running a business, well we all knew how to run it better than he did of course, you know that's typical. I think the only genuine complaints that we really had were that he let the equipment go

too long, especially me, god it drove me nuts I couldn't stand using those same damn old ropes.

Jean: Swedlund had the same problem. Also didn't he not want you to incorporate newer climbing techniques?

Byrd: Yeah, Glenn was, Glenn was just, uh he was in 1939 period and he didn't really want things to change, but things were changing, and the younger guides, they would come, cause I was the so-called chief guide for about 10 years, and so uh, mainly beth and Glenn wanted to get out of the hassle of the younger guides coming in and saying why don't we, why don't we why don't we. And so they spun that off on me.

Jean: I see, so then they deflected it by having a chief guide who is in charge of all that. But then would he want you to still.

Byrd: I'd screen the complaints.

Jean: But then did you still have to play by Glenn's rules.

Byrd: Oh sure, we all had to play by Glenn's rules, and Beth. I mean, Beth was very much in control.

Jean: The strong woman behind the man.

Byrd: But I would screen the complaints and I'd sort out what was really meaningful to the guides, I mean sort of the last line, this is it or I quite type stuff, and I'd go down and just chat with Beth and Glenn when I knew that it was comfortable to do so, about making a few changes and that was really the only way we got any new stuff, and were able to incorporate an intermediate climbing school and an advanced climbing school which were big steps for Glenn, he worried about that for the next three years, just having it different than the basic climbing school.

Jean: Do you remember when it was that you divided the school into classes?

Byrd: It was before 55. Oh, I remember it was 53, cause I was not there in 52, I was climbing in Europe. That was also the thing. See, back in those days, now you've got, what a million and a half climbers in this country, so you don't have any, nobody goes through any systems any more you just do your own things, but back in those days if you were going to be a person at all with any climbing reputation you had to climb in Europe, or you weren't nothin, heh, heh, you know, you had to do the European thing

Jean: Where?

Byrd: Well, the Swiss, Italian and French Alps. So I went over and did the European things and came back in 53 to guide again. And that was the year, I was full of all kinds of things I'd learned in Europe.

Jean: Were they way ahead of us?

Byrd: Well in some ways, but they weren't ahead of guys like Yvon and Royal, who sort of led the rock climbing advancement techniques in those days.

Jean: Internationally.

Bill: Yeah, and they started the big climbs in Yosemite, the big rock walls in Yosemite

Jean: And Pratt too, right? Chuck Pratt

Bill: Yeah, yeah, and Irene Ortenberger, well her name was Beardsley at the time, but Irene Ortenberger among the women was doing high angle stuff, started high angle stuff her name was Irene Beardsly, then she climbed with Lee a couple of times, and then she climbed with Pownall, and I made two big climbs with her, we did the lower Exum together.

Jean: Did you do any Yosemite climbing?

Bill: No, it didn't interest me.

Jean: Are we talking 40s and 50s here. 40s and 50s Where was the center for the most innovative climbing, was it in the Tetons.

Bill: Yeah, yeah.

Jean: That was the place to go, whereas in Europe you need to go to the alps, the the U.S. it was the Tetons. Yosemite hadn't yet factored in, and that happened more in the 60s?

Bill: Yep, late fifties, and through the sixties, and seventies. And the other feeling that was predominant in the climbing groups of people doing it in those days was, you had to start in the valley, go through several climactic zones, and then you did the couloirs and the snow fields and eventually you did the summit. Well you see now today you drive your convertible out at the base of a pitch and you turn the volume up on the radio, get out your harnesses and your three hundred bucks worth of gear, you climb for a couple of hours, rappel off go home and you done a climb.

Jean: How do you feel about sport climbing, this is jumping way ahead, but what is your impression and what do you think that it has done for this sport of mountaineering that you helped pioneer.

Bill: Well it isn't mountaineering to start out with, its rock climbing and there's a very big difference. :You turn a lot of these high angle climbers loose on a glacier and they'd kill themselves, but I mean its a sport so I don't have any quarrel with it, I just don't do it, doesn't appeal to me at all, and you know climbing with 500 bucks worth of stuff doesn't appeal to me either. Its just me and the mountains that I like.

Jean: When you pioneered the sport it was very simplistic in terms of gear. what would you go out with.

Bill: Climbing rope, and if you were doing a new route or trying something new you always took half a dozen carabiners and some pitons along. (He goes into his office to find an old rack) But you see this stuff was okay as long as there weren't very many people doing it.

Jean: Oh, its heavy.

Bill: Yeah, but see the thing about now is the techniques have improved so that you can have masses of people doing it because you don't pry the rocks loose any more and bring the mountain down on top of you.

(We look at the rack, an old caribiner)

Jean: Who designed these?

Bill: These are swiss probably, swiss, bought from REI.

(We spot one of Yvon's first Cromalli, he explains how they fit into the crack.)

Bill: We used these a fair amount guiding, cause guiding you know you got to be aware you've got three of four people in a row.

Jean: Guiding is a whole different thing.

Bill: Oh yes, guiding is a whole different ball-game than going out with a guy who's equally competent.

Jean: I want to go back before we get too far away from it and ask what you think happened between Glenn and Paul.

Bill: Oh, I think it was a personality thing entirely. Uh Paul was very, and one of the big differences of opinions was Paul wanted to station guides at the lower saddle and leave them there all summer and Exum absolutely objected to that and Beth wouldn't have anything to do with it.

Jean: I wonder why.?

Bill: Well they thought it was unfair to the guides, and they didn't know how to structure it.

Jean: You mean, they'd get paid more?

Bill: Well that was the problem, how do you pay them when they only do half the mountain or something you know.

Jean: And then what about the other guides.

Bill: Yeah, how do you figure in the other guides, when do you relieve them, how do you communicate with them.

Jean: Didn't one guide, who was it, didn't one guide end up staying up there for a really long time once.

Bill: Willie and I were up there for one month.

Jean: Did you have families at the time?

Bill: Yeah.

Jean: And so they were down at the camp.

Bill: They were down at Jenny Lake, there along cottonwood creek.

Jean: Did they come up to see you?

Bill: Jolene would come up, Joanne never did come up, but Joanne knew everybody in the valley cause she had worked there for years. Jolene didn't know anybody in the valley.

Jean: Where did Joanne work?

Bill: Joanne was a secretary for the old old, ancient grand teton park service. When the park was one one hundredth of its size when I first lived here the boundaries were right along the base of Teewinot, they were on the other side of the road, see and that's why Rockefeller bought up all the lands, there were these damned dude rings, bars, rodeo pins all up and down what's now Jenny lake drive. When we first started going out there in 46 47, there were seven permanent rangers, now there's probably 70 at

least.

Jean: And they were just started the idea to have climbing rangers.

Bill: Oh yeah, they hated the climbers, because they would fall and kill themselves every so often and then what do we do? there weren't any climbing rangers, they had to ask for volunteers around town to come up and evacuate people. So Emerson and I started the first mountain rescue squad

Jean: So you worked for the park.

Bill: yeah, temporary ranger, I started out there

Jean: As a climbing ranger.

Bill: Well, they didn't have any such thing . We were on the gates, taking tickets, and we were sitting in our gates, the traffic in those days? There wasn't any hardly. uh the south station, which meant you got peple coming up from Jackson into the Park, the south station would be reasonably busy, like you would average a car every half hour?

Jean: Could you read in- between?

Bill: Read, heck we were outside planing routes, with field glasses, and stuff, for our days off, you know. But the guy on the north station, this was a snoozer. The guy on the north station might have had 20 cars a day in an eight hour shift, so whenever you had the north station duty you took books, and maps.

Jean: So you informally started this rescue.

Bill: Well, there was guy on the staff by the name of John De la Montagne., and montagne was an easterner, New Hampshire, climbed in the Shawangunks and mount washington and in through there, and John was a Dartmouth, professor at the time?, yeah. [not positive but things he was professor, not student] And he ended up at the campus in Eastern Montana, Montana state, and

John was a temporary ranger too, at the time, yeah, he was. But he was the one who primarily organized the mountain rescue squad and Emerson and I were the instructors. But what precipitate it was, a couple of brothers climbed Nez Perce and one of em fell off, god you know that summit is shaped like an L. Its rotten an lot of falling rock on Nez Perce.

Anyway, these guys got up there on that L shaped summit and this guy said to his brother go over there and I'll take your picture. And the guy goes over there and says move back a little you're too close. Unroped, so he didn't stop falling for 3 or 400 feet, and so then his brother came tearing down to the park service saying my brother is up there and he's probably there, we gotta go get him, with who? was the answer, well ah gee we'll go downtown and see if we can get some guys together.

Well, Montagne said you know this is ridiculous, and we have some responsibility, so he got about 15 of us together and we whacked our way up Nez Perce and hauled this guy back down, and of course no choppers in those days so it was a lot of hard work.

And McLaren was telling me that they had these huge radios, did you even have radios at that point?

No. [we discuss the heavy radios that used to take up space in an entire pack.]

Jean: You did this first rescue and then you realized

Bill: Yeah Montagne, without John's leadership he wouldn't have been a rock climbing group. Now I'm not sure that he was temporary Jean, Doug McLaren would know although Doug was around, but I think they knew of Montagne's work, cause John really got the rescue squad going. But they still call on volunteers because there weren't any climbing rangers.

Jean: Tell me the story about how you got started with Petzoldt Exum

Bill: With Paul? Hah. With Paul, I was on duty at the north station and my shift ended at five o'clock. And what did I do, oh I went to Leigh Lake fishing, I took the pick up the park pick up. oh I also worked for the fishing guide - oh god, the trouble of being old is -

Jean: For a fishing outfit in Jackson.

Bill: The guy at Moose - Bob Carmichle. Uh, his son now runs the thing. And Bob had given me the key to the boat's he'd stashed at Leigh Lake, so I'd go up to north station, I mean the chief ranger didn't care, in those days we were just a friendly little family, none of the really rigid government red tape stuff they do nowadays. So they didn't care if I was two hours late coming in from the north station, no one cared the assumed I was goofing off somewhere or up at signal mountain. So I went fishing until it started to get dark, then I drove back along Jenny Lake, and I heard this, I had the windows open, it was a summer night, and I heard see I'd been logging around here, too, so I knew what a chain saw sounded like, it has a very distinct sound, you don't mix it up with a leaf blower or anything else, no, when you hear a chain saw. So, Hah, I heard a chain saw and it was up in the park boundaries and I thought now who the hell? I knew where all the trail crews were, and i knew Bob Kranenberg wasn't cutting poles to build anything at headquarters, so I thought, I turned down the old ccc road behind what became the Exum headquarters, so I went down that road out toward teewinot to where I hear this sound, and I saw this huge big old army truck parked there, surplus army truck, and I thought what in the hell is this, so i get out of the car with my flashlight and here is this guy cutting timber inside the Park and stackin the poles in his truck and I thought who in the hell is this, it was a great big guy, so I walk up to him with my flashlight, and I said, what in the hell are you doing.

And old Paul just gives you this big grin, and says weel Hi ranger, I was just cutting a few poles here for my -- you know, laughs,

I said are you aware that you are inside the national park and its illegal to cut timber in here?

Oh well, I'm not takin very many you know I'm just taking a few, and we got to talking there and I discovered who it was, and I'd hear of this guy but I'd never met him

Jean: Because he had his guide school, you hadn't been curious to just go meet him?

Bill: And he said, oh, you're [aside] I mean this is Paul at work, "Oh you're the young man that went up there on the middle teton on that new route with Dick Emerson, that's some of the finest climbing I've heard of in a long time.

[We laugh]

Jean: So he flattered you.

Bill: And then my head starts to going. who is this guy, can't be all bad.

Jean: Did you respect his climbing ability, was he someone you knew as a good climber.

Bill: Yeah, I'd heard of his reputation and I knew that he ran the school, but I'd never met the guy, and I'd never been to the school. So, then we got to talking and he said, you know, I could use another guy.

So I said well now, Paul, you can't cut any more timber in here, you got to get the hell out of here. [we laugh] he said oh sure he said now Bill, when do you get off tomorrow. You come around the school and we'll get squared away on a trip up the

Jean: Now what year was this?

Bill: It must have been 47 or 48.

Jean: Were you married at the time?

Bill: Oh, no, gosh no. Heh.

Jean: Also, how old are you now, or how old were you then, I need to get some kind of age

Bill: I'm 70 now. So I came around the next day and Paul said, I've got to take a load up to the lower saddle, and I have two people to go along, so you come along with me and you know he said so you can pack some of this gear. Well you know what the gear was, a case of beer.

Jean: Oh, I heard about this. Did you know what it was?

Bill: Sure I knew what it was. I figured he was going up to the lower saddle with it. So we got up to the lower saddle and Paul says, well, we'll climb the ridge in the morning along with these two people and Paul says bring that beer along, I need that on top. I thought what? what the hell is he doing with beer on top of the mountain and so we got up there and when we got up, to these, I'd never been on the dang Exum routes before, I'd been up the Owen, I had never been on the Exum ridge. And Paul, we got out to the end of Wall street, and Paul says, well you know, we rope up here, but Bill you didn't need to rope up here, that damn pack is so big, you know the rope will be in your road, you just follow along behind. So I said, well, okay, so that's what I did.

Jean: That's pretty exposed right there. So you climbed it the way Glenn first did.

Bill: Well at least I had proper shoes on. Glenn went up there with stupid football shoes

Jean: Oversized. So what kind of shoes were you wearing at the time?

Bill: I don't know whether we had vibrams yet at the time or not, I don't think so. So what did I have, I had trichonium boots.

Jean: He sounds like quite the wheeler dealer.

Bill: Paul? He's the world's worst. Goll, that guy is something else. Anyway we got up to the top and Paul said, oh now uh, Bill, I'll take that beer. And he disappeared around to the north side. Well what he does, you probably know this story,

Jean: Kinda remembers a little bit.

Bill: See the other thing you have to remember is, now days the way Peter and al have to work nowadays with all those guides and all those people you never see the same clientele year after year.

Jean: There are a few people they knew really well who come back

Bill: And most of the people who climb were from the East coast, and so Paul had developed a clientele, that, they didn't come back every year but maybe every one year or every third year they'd come back with a new partner or wife or somebody else, but they were essentially the same people, or references from personal contact, and he said, you know so often the guys would get up there - there were very few women who climbed in those days - the guys would get up there and say, oh I'd give five bucks or fifty bucks for a beer, Paul'd reach behind the rock and hand them a beer and collect the money.

Jean: He would?

Bill: Yes.

Jean: Did he give you any of the profits for that day?

Bill: No!

Jean: So then you climbed with him those two days,

Bill: I climbed with Paul then and we did another grand climb together. [pauses to think] This was hysterical. [laughs] I had a group of young kids from Blackfoot, Idaho, I had a neat customer

from Blackfoot, who ran, Bud oh irrelevant, but Bud had told these kids they should go to climb the grand teton, okay, there were five of them, they were neat kids, they were teenagers, but they were in shape, they were eager to climb the mountain, we had a great trip, it was very early, back in those days there was hardly any climbing before mid-July, I would always, see I was teaching school.

Jean: Really? Cause I've done some really good climbs in June.

Bill: Oh yeah, but back in those days nobody would even think of coming in June because of the snow. They didn't know how to function in snow, so you gotta wait until the rock comes out, so that's why I started fish guiding, because there wasn't much to do I'd get out there like the 10th of June, and uh, there may be half a dozen climbs until the fourth of July, then the other guides'd come, Corbet and Unsoeld and Pownall would come in about the fifth of July.

Jean: Were you all teaching the rest of the year?

Bill: Most of us were teachers. Ortenberger, yeah, Lee was a math professor, Dick taught junior high school, I taught high school, Corbet was not a teacher, Breitenbach was not a teacher, Bob Miriam was a teacher, Dingman was not a teacher. So, but there were a fair number of us that were, and the others of us were probably in graduate school on the way to a degree of some kind or another, so they had the summer available, but I'd get out there around the 8th, 9th or 10th of June and be the only guy there until the fourth of July. I'd have maybe a half a dozen climbs between the 8th or 9th of June and the 4th of July. The rest of the time I'd be fish guiding with Bob, just to keep some money coming in.

But an early climb, this was early, like the 10th or 12th of June. Lots of Snow, all over, solid snow from the lower saddle to garnet canyon. Well you know where the Petzoldt caves are,

Jean: That's where you guys would overnight?

Bill: Sometimes. That was a frequent overnighter. And you know just left of the caves the lower rocks that spill down into a waterfall, the big cliffs that spill down into there? We were coming off of the lower saddle, and the guys wanted to glissade, and so I said okay, we'll have glissading school down to the cup, right below the lower saddle there, and that's pretty steep you know, coming down off the lower saddle,, and so I taught them how to glissade down that far and they were doing pretty well. Then we ran up some of the snow fields on the planks on the middle and practiced some more. Then I said now, we got out her on the next one and I said, there's no bottom. If you get loose down here you go over that cliff, with that waterfall down there, because you gotta glissade along here and angle off to your left until we hit the moraine down there right above the petzoldt caves.

Jean: Yeah Okay.

Bill: So I mistakenly turned them loose on that slope. Well, the first three kids went just fine right into a beautiful traverse over the top of the caves. And the next kid started out. He fell once but he self arrested, got up and got over there. The last kid was the biggest kid, and had done the best so far, but he just blew it. He started out, and he got about 50 feet down that slope and fell on his back, and I looked at him for a minute, I said god that kid's not gonna roll over, he's not gonna self arrest. What the hell is this its trouble, so i just took off like a shot, and I thought I could Glissade faster than he could slide so I get down in front of him and dive into a self arrest and he'd run into me and will stop me. Well he hit me and by that time he was really going and I skied around, got down in front of him, put my ax in and got down and he hit me and both of us went over that cliff. I didn't realize I was so close to the cliffs, and just the impact of him hitting me shoved me about 20 feet down the slope and the two of us went swoosh right out into the air he his ton that slope going down you know, he was still'd probably put it through me one time or another I still had mine, so we hit on the way down, finally, it was like parachuting, so we finally hit down there and I got us to a stop, oh about 50 feet above the rocks, and we sat up and

brushed ourselves off and had a good laugh, and I thought Byrd you idiot you are lucky you didn't lose this guy, well, we sat up, brushed the snow out of our eyes, turned around, and here was Paul, standing right there he'd seen the whole thing. I thought, oh god my guiding days are over!.

Jean: It was only your second time?

Bill: Yeah, and Paul was laughing the tears rolling down his face, he said Bill that's the damndest descent I've ever seen. [we laugh]

Jean: And so you were in for good then.

Bill: Oh yeah, he said god I like this man. He said there's only one trouble with this bill, the rest of your party is clear the hell up there. Well it was just trail walking for them after that, we all got together, down there and then paul said, I got two people sitting back here that'r kinda tired, do you want to go back up to the lower saddle and take em on up to the top? I gotta go down. So I said okay.

Jean: So then you went back up?

Bill: Yap and took these people up the mountain the next day and then came back down again. Then after that, why Paul called on me fairly regularly.

Jean: And then you quit the park.

Bill: Well, the next year.

Jean: So you were doing this sort of on your days off.

Bill: Yeah, this was doing it on days off.

Jean: So the next year you came back formally working for the guide school. And Paul and Glenn were both there at the time.

Bill: Yeah, but Paul left mid season and then I didn't see him again for five years.

Jean: So this was in the mid fifties... No, no no, he left to travel, and Glenn took over, thats right. So then do you remember when you first met Glenn?

Bill: I really don't. But I think it was the next year after that fall over the waterfall laughs. It must have been the next year.

Jean: Was there a sense... looking back its apparent that you were pioneers in the development of this sport, and making it a legitimate profession, whereas up to that point really for most people was an avocation. What are your thoughts about that? Were you aware of what you were doing at the time? was there anything deliberate about how you were doing it?

Bill: There wasn't until I went to Europe and went to guide school over there. I was very lucky. I came into Zermot in 52, and I had heard that one of my former students at the Exum climbing school, basic school John Churchill, was now in Zermot climbing. He'd been at the school two years before in 1950 just for the summer and the guy was an outstanding climber, he'd never climbed anything before in his life and he was a natural. he did so well in climbing school he almost climbed my back, you know, and then we took him, he did three of four climbs just beautifully and went back, he was working for the marshall plan in london at the time, he was a fairly high ranking employee at the state dept working for the marshall plan in London rehabilitation you know of Britain, but I'd heard John was in Zermot.

I came into Zermot and walked into the public square and John was there talking to some guides, and that was the evening word had come down that Hilda Erlanger, an american woman, had a good reputation as a climber, she and her guide, I'll think of his name after you leave, had fallen on the italian ridge of the matterhorn, he was a swiss, he was the head swiss guide as a matter of fact, the biggie,

But they had fallen on the Italian side and they were putting a

rescue party together because Erlanger always climbed, she posted a bond, which you have to do in Europe. Over here, we are our brothers keeper. We take care of the stupid, the untrained, the idiots, the unprepared, you know we take care of them at public expense. In Europe, no way. If you want to get rescued, you take out a bond, and we'll spend your money getting you back down here if you get hurt. If you don't post a bond, we'll be glad to cover you up right where you lie. It works beautifully, and if they came to their senses in this country they'd do it, I think. Anyway, that's irrelevant.

Jean: It costs the park a lot of money to do all the rescues, .

Bill: You bet it does and nobody pays you a dime.

Jean: And sometimes people sue you

Bill: yeah, that's the thanks you get riskin your butt up there to bring em down.

Jean: So she had posted a bond.

Bill: She'd posted bond, So they were putting a rescue party together and John had said to me, you know, you're on the team. Hey I just got here. That's fine. So we went up and pulled this rescue off, on the, we had to climb the Hurdly ridge swiss ridge and go down the Italian ridge where the accident happened to bring Hilda back up over the top back into Zermot, she didn't want to go into Chamonoix, so we had to bring her manually, with a stokes litter, halfway up the italian ridge, down the Hurdley.

Jean: Why didn't she want to go down the other side?

Bill: I don't know but she had mega bucks so she didn't really give a damn, she just wanted to go to a swiss hospital. She didn't trust the french.

Jean: But you guys rescued her guide too, right?

Bill: He was dead.

Jean: Oh, he was dead.

Bill: By the time we'd got there, he had died. So that was my introduction to the Alps. And John said, okay, now we hadn't any sleep for 36 hours so we better go to sleep for a while, the guides are just finishing the school, and this is the last two weeks of instruction for the apprentice guides and we can join if you want, he said I can get you in. John knew everybody in Zermot I discovered so it was great. So we went out on the rifflehorn and finished the climbing school with these guides and I thought oh, this is amazing, the way they take care of their people.

Jean: So they took care of their people? Oh, I know what you are talking about

Bill: You were suggesting, see we put this thing together over here. We thought, you know if we go first, that's all we have to do, belay these people, but we really didn't know what we were doing other than that, which worked, I mean Glenn had a pretty accident free business, and, yeah, it was, you know there was a bit of luck involved, but, uh, I was impressed with the fact that the Swiss had years of technique involved in this, so when I came back I was al full of this instruction, and i knew that there were certain things that they did that wouldn't go over in this country. They were too rigid.

Jean: We were kind of independently oriented, and didn't Petzoldt and Exum want to have their clients be more independent? And that was conscious, that wasn't because it was easier. that was because they wanted people to learn how to climb.

Bill: Yeah, and the whole idea was different in Europe. They wanted to keep you dependent upon them, so that you come back year after year and you take the same guide, so its always one-on-one, They'd never take two people. Very competitive, the Swiss guides were very competitive, and you know we didn't have that, we had a monopoly in the Tetons, so

we didn't have to worry about the competition of guides, so that was irrelevant with this country. And the other philosophy that both Paul and Glenn agreed upon was, they didn't want people dependent on them, they wanted people to learn how to climb. So making the switches between the two techniques came up with the Exum Petzoldt technique, I guess you called it, which was a combination of the European techniques which were appropriate for over here, and substituting that for liberating these folks to climb on their own, encouraging them to do so. Now a lot of people over here did not want to, they were of the same mentality, they wanted to be guided all the time. Some of our clientele, well, okay, we didn't have any objection to that.

Jean: But then they could hire a private guide. How many people would you have as clients at one time.

Bill: Well generally Beth would cut us off for climbing school at, she would let me take 20.

Jean: Really? So she would basically determine it on what she thought you could handle. So there wasn't any formal guidelines.

Bill: Not really, and they would, uh, Beth for instance if you were a brand new guide, she would not let you take more than two on the Exum ridge, but if you were there for a while and they understood that you were careful and could handle more you could take as many as five, and of course the longer you worked there, all of us wanted full parties because we wanted the buck.

Jean: You would take 20 for what? Climbing School. The beginning climbing school and the intermediate?

Jean: No not intermediate. The basic school was easy to handle and there wasn't much danger there. But the intermediate school you did some higher angle stuff about there. The limit for the intermediate school was 6, and the advanced school was 3. I don't know what it is now.

[we discuss basic, intermediate and advanced school now]

Jean: So Beth was really in charge, it sounds like.

Bill: Yeah, she was the power behind the --, yes,

Jean: And people knew that? It was obvious?

Bill: No, Well the guides did. And that was okay, I didn't ever have any violent arguments with beth. We had differences of opinion but generally we would compromise our differences, but she was a lot more rigid than Glenn, and Beth was really our safety valve, in terms of mountaineering safety. She would detect fatigue in you, in august, and she'd make you take days off. She could tell when you were strung out, and you did, you could get strung out, you'd take ten trips up the Grand during the summer and you were not only in superb physical condition, but you were a nervous wreck, too.

Jean: yeah, and you probably then wouldn't have the sense to quit on your own, you'd get into this cycle where you are just so used to doing it.

Bill: And this was one of the main differences between Beth and Glenn and Paul. Paul would let you run as long as you wanted to run until you ran down and if you ran down, it was your own poor damn judgement. But Beth and Glenn put stopper in there.

Jean: But also didn't Glenn get along better with the park. Was he more diplomatic, and wasn't that a problem that...

Bill: Oh yea, they were scared to death of paul,

Jean: Well he was probably irreverent. Interesting. And so, just from some of the other tapes that I've listened too, it seemed ultimately why paul left, because he wasn't able to operate smoothly with the park, but I'm not sure of that.

Bill: I'm not either. No, I wasn't. I think that's a hell of a good guess, because Paul was at odds with park people fairly often. He was a very innovative, very imaginative guy and a very high

geared person, they were so different in that respect. One of the innovations I worked in after coming back from Europe was our guide's day. I thought it was terrible that we didn't ever do anything together, the guides. If you happened to get a day off together it was just coincidence, and then if you were married, you usually had something else to do. I thought it was just a damn shame that we didn't shut the place down for a weekend and all of us get to know each other on a rope.

Jean: So you started that.

Bill: yeah.

Jean: And when did that start.

Bill: Oh golly I don't know. Pownall felt the same but a lot of this was unexpressed for a while and when I came back from Europe and saw what they had done over there, you know I voiced the thing out loud in one of our little informal meeting up on the hill, and Pownall took it right over and said we needed to do something like that/ And Willie did too, he really felt that was a superb idea, and so the three of us went down, and we started, we figured it was going to take a year to talk Glenn into it, but

Jean: This was when Glenn was the sole owner.

Bill: Paul would have gone for it tomorrow morning. That was the difference. paul would say lets go to Baxters tomorrow morning! and Glenn would say lets think about it for the next year.

Jean: Classic example. Its clear to me that this guide school and the people who were climbing in the Tetons were the people who went on to be the innovators, the people who did the major climbs throughout the world, or took climbing into the Peace Corp or started other leadership schools. Why did that happen with this group of climber? What qualified the level of excellence. Why were all these climbers so good and they went on to be the achievers.